

BURIALS OUTSIDE THE CEMETERIES FOUND IN PIUA PETRI (ORAȘUL DE FLOCI), COMMUNE OF GIURGENI, IALOMIȚA COUNTY

Silviu OȚA

National History Museum, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: silviuota@yahoo.com

Liana OȚA

“Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: loredanaota@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The medieval town Orașul de Floci (name suggesting the intense wool trade) was for the first time mentioned in documents in 1431, during Dan the Second's reign (1422-1426; 1427-1431). Located at the mouth of Ialomița River, at the border of Țara Românească, Orașul de Floci was an important commercial and handicraft centre of Wallachia, especially during the 15th-17th centuries. Several attacks troubled the town, the most violent one being that in 1470, when it was attacked by an army of Stephen the Great.*

During archaeological excavations in 1996 and 2000, skeletons of two individuals were found, both of them outside the area of the cemeteries. The first skeleton was registered on the top of the bank ridge no. 6a. A silver coin, issued during the reign of Ferdinand the First (1526-1564), more precisely in 1563, in the mint from Kremnitz, was found near the skull. The grave was overlapped by a dwelling reconstructed several times. Fragments of a skeleton belonging to a female were found in 2000 on the top of the bank ridge no. 1.

Taking into consideration the orientation of the skeleton (west-east), the position (lying on the back) and the deposition of a coin, we believe that the first individual, the one found on the top of the bank ridge no. 6a, was buried, in the proper sense of the word. We believe that the scattered bones of the women cannot be interpreted as burial. In this case, we have to deal with a so-called 'unburied dead'. A chronological relation between the fragments of the dead body and the attack from 1470 is the most probable explanation, in our opinion.

Rezumat: *Orașul medieval numit Orașul de Floci (nume ce arată comerțul intens cu lână) a fost menționat în documente pentru prima dată în anul 1431, în timpul domniei lui Dan al II-lea (1422-1426; 1427-1431). Plasat la gurile Ialomiței, în zonă de graniță a Țării Românești, acesta a fost un important centru comercial și meșteșugăresc al Valahiei, în special în sec. XV-XVII. Câteva atacuri au afectat orașul, cel mai violent dintre ele având loc în 1470, cu ocazia atacului armatei lui Ștefan cel Mare.*

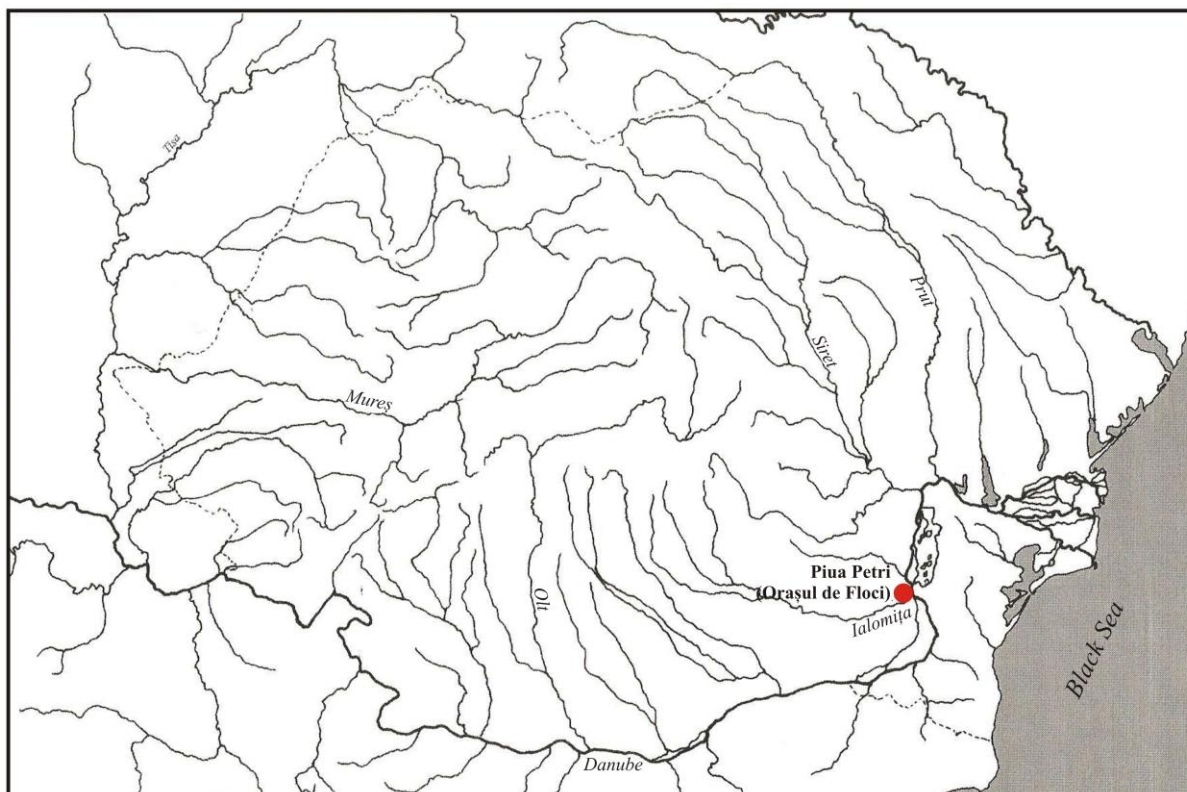
Cercetările arheologice din anii 1996 și 2000 au dus la descoperirea a două schelete umane, ambele în afara necropolelor cunoscute. Primul dintre ele a fost identificat pe grindul 6a. O monedă de argint, emisă în cursul anului 1563, în timpul domniei lui Ferdinand I (1526-1564) a fost descoperită lângă craniu. Mormântul a fost suprapus de o locuință cu mai multe faze de refacere. Alte fragmente de schelet, aparținând însă unei persoane de sex feminin au fost identificate pe grindul nr. 1, în campania din anul 2000.

Având în vedere orientarea scheletului (vest-est), poziția (întins pe spate) și depunerea unei monede, presupunem că primul decedat, cel găsit pe grindul nr. 6a, a fost înmormântat, în sensul strict al cuvântului. Credem însă că oasele împrăștiat ale femeii nu pot fi interpretate ca mormânt. Probabil că în acest caz este vorba de un așa-numit „mort neîngropat”. Cea mai probabilă explicație, în opinia noastră, are în vedere o relație cronologică între fragmentele scheletului feminin și atacul din 1470.

Keywords: *burial, human bones, coin, pottery, rare funerary practices.*

Cuvinte cheie: *înmormântare, oase umane, monedă, ceramică, practici funerare rare.*

The medieval town Orașul de Floci (name suggesting the intense wool trade), with a history covering four centuries, was for the first time mentioned in documents in 1431, during Dan the Second's reign (1422-1426; 1427-1431).¹ Located at the mouth of Ialomița River, at the border of Țara Românească, Orașul de Floci (Pl. 1–2) was an important commercial and handicraft centre of Wallachia, especially during the 15th-17th centuries. Several attacks troubled the town, the most violent one being that in 1470, when it was attacked by an army of Stephen the Great.²



Pl. 1. Piua Petri.

According to the prevalent opinion, Orașul de Floci was identified on the site called Piua Petri, close to the nowadays commune of Giurgeni, Ialomița County. The archaeological excavations in Piua Petri started in 1975.³ Up until now, a relatively small number of papers has been published, most of them excavation reports more or less detailed.⁴ Only few studies discuss some types of items,⁵ specific archaeological contexts⁶ or questions regarding the history of the town.⁷

¹ Chițescu et al. 1979, 214; Rădulescu 1983, 135.

² Costăchescu 1935.

³ Chițescu et al. 1979, 199-246.

⁴ Chițescu et al. 1979, 199-246; Chițescu et al. 1981, 120-143; Chițescu et al. 1982, 129-158; Chițescu et al. 1983, 94-108; Păunescu 1984, 143-151; Chițescu, Păunescu 1986, 75-83; Chițescu et al. 1992, 97-104, fig. 1-6; Păunescu et al. 1997, 255-262; Păunescu et al. 2006, 111-132; Păunescu et al. 2007-2008, 11-42; Păunescu et al. 2010, 225-240.

⁵ Mihai 1997, 277-289, pl. 1-4; Anton-Manea 2000, 97-139; Oța, Pârvan 2003, 241-247; Ene 2013, 197-206.



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Pl. 2. 1-2. Images from Piua Petri (comm. of Giurgeni, Ialomiţa County).

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- ⁶ Păunescu, Renţa 1998-2000, 175-182; Coman et al. 2003, 45-56; Oţa 2006, 225-235; Oţa, Pârvan 2005, 259-265; Oţa 2011-2012 (2012), 149-157, Oţa et al. 2006, 87-99, Oţa et al. 2004-2007 (2007), 65-73, pl. 1-8.
- ⁷ Conovici 1975, 63-68; Rădulescu 1983, 135-14; Păunescu 2005.

In 1996⁸ and 2000,⁹ skeletons of two individuals were found, both of them outside the area of the cemeteries (Pl. 3).

The first skeleton was registered on the top of the bank ridge no. 6a, at 80 cm depth (Pl. 4).¹⁰ Unfortunately, the shape of the pit could not be observed, due to the colour of the soil and the later buildings which disturbed the area. The skeleton, oriented west-east, was lying on the back, with the left arm along the body and the skull on the right side, looking towards south. It was partially disturbed. The left leg and the right forearm were missing. Probably it belongs to a male, but unfortunately an anthropological examination is not possible, because the bones could not be identified yet in the collections of The National Museum of History of Romania or The Institute of Anthropology in Jassy. A silver coin, issued during the reign of Ferdinand the First, more precisely in 1563, in the mint from Kremnitz, was found near the skull (Pl. 4/2).

The grave was overlapped by a dwelling reconstructed several times (Pl. 7/1).¹¹ Besides pottery (Pl. 7/4), inside were found animal bones, Iznik pottery (Pl. 5/1,¹² Pl. 6/1¹³), coins minted in the 16th century, hairpins and appliques of knives made in Styria or imitations of them.¹⁴ The lumps and ingots of bronze (Pl. 7/2) and the stone grinder (Pl. 7/3) were probably kept in the dwelling for the needs of a workshop built nearby.¹⁵

Fragments of a skeleton belonging to a female were found in 2000 (Pl. 8) on the top of the bank ridge no. 1, at a depth of 44-45 cm.¹⁶ Towards the southern limit of the section were registered disconnected human bones, more precisely a fragment of vertebral column, fragments of ribs, a collar bone, fragment of a radius or a cubitus and a finger. A special pit for the deposition of human bones was not observed. The same situation was registered for other fragments of skeleton, found four meters south-east, at the same depth of 44 cm. The disconnected human bones were oriented west-east and consist in a skull looking towards north-east, a fragment of spin, few scattered ribs, two shoulder bones, one of which was not in anatomical position, and the left humerus. Third remnants, consisting in ribs only, were found at 39 cm depth, near the second cluster of bones. The last cluster was situated five meters north-east, at 42 cm depth. The disparate human bones consist in a rib, a finger, bones of the pelvis and a vertebra. Most probably, all the mentioned human bones belonged to a single individual. Unfortunately, the small surface of the excavation does not allow us to know if other dead bodies were thrown in the same area.

⁸ Chițescu et al. 1997, 45.

⁹ Păunescu et al. 2001, 92.

¹⁰ OȚa 2006, 225-226, 235, fig. 6.

¹¹ OȚa 2006, 225.

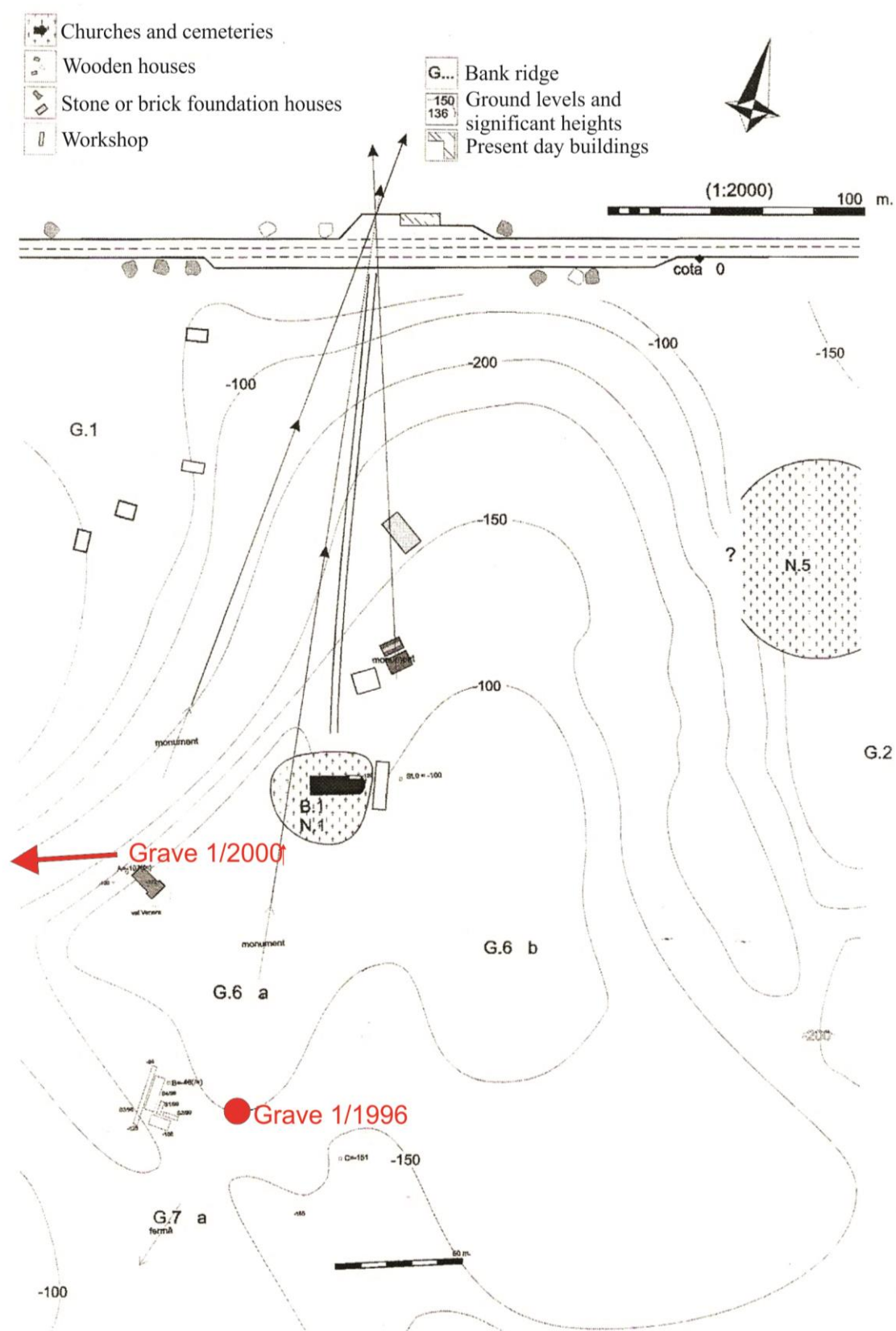
¹² Atasoy, Raby 1994, cat. 689, 728.

¹³ Atasoy, Raby 1994, cat. 737.

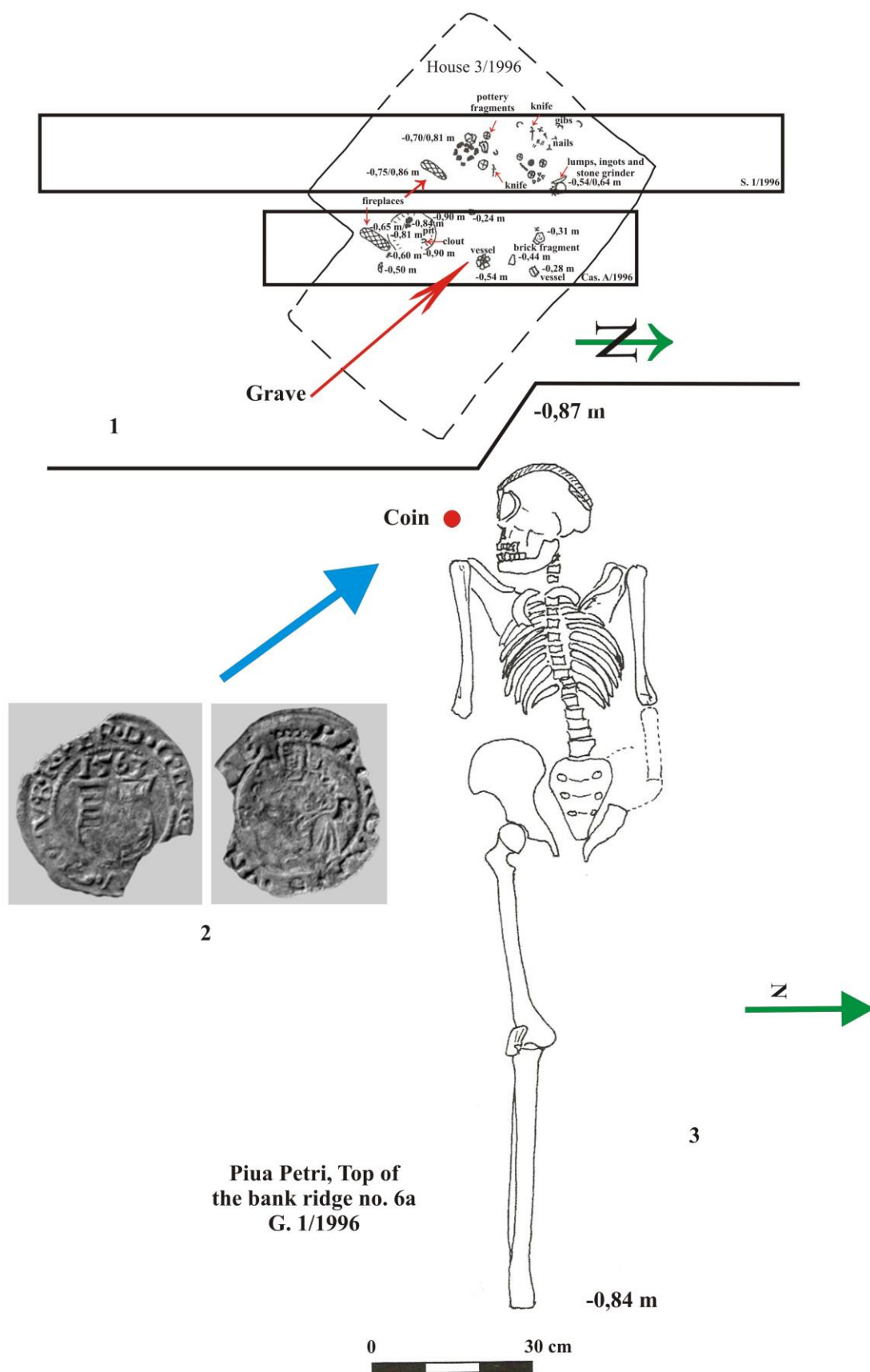
¹⁴ Holl 1994-1995, 159-188; OȚa 2006, 233, fig. 4.

¹⁵ OȚa 2006, 226, 234, fig. 5.

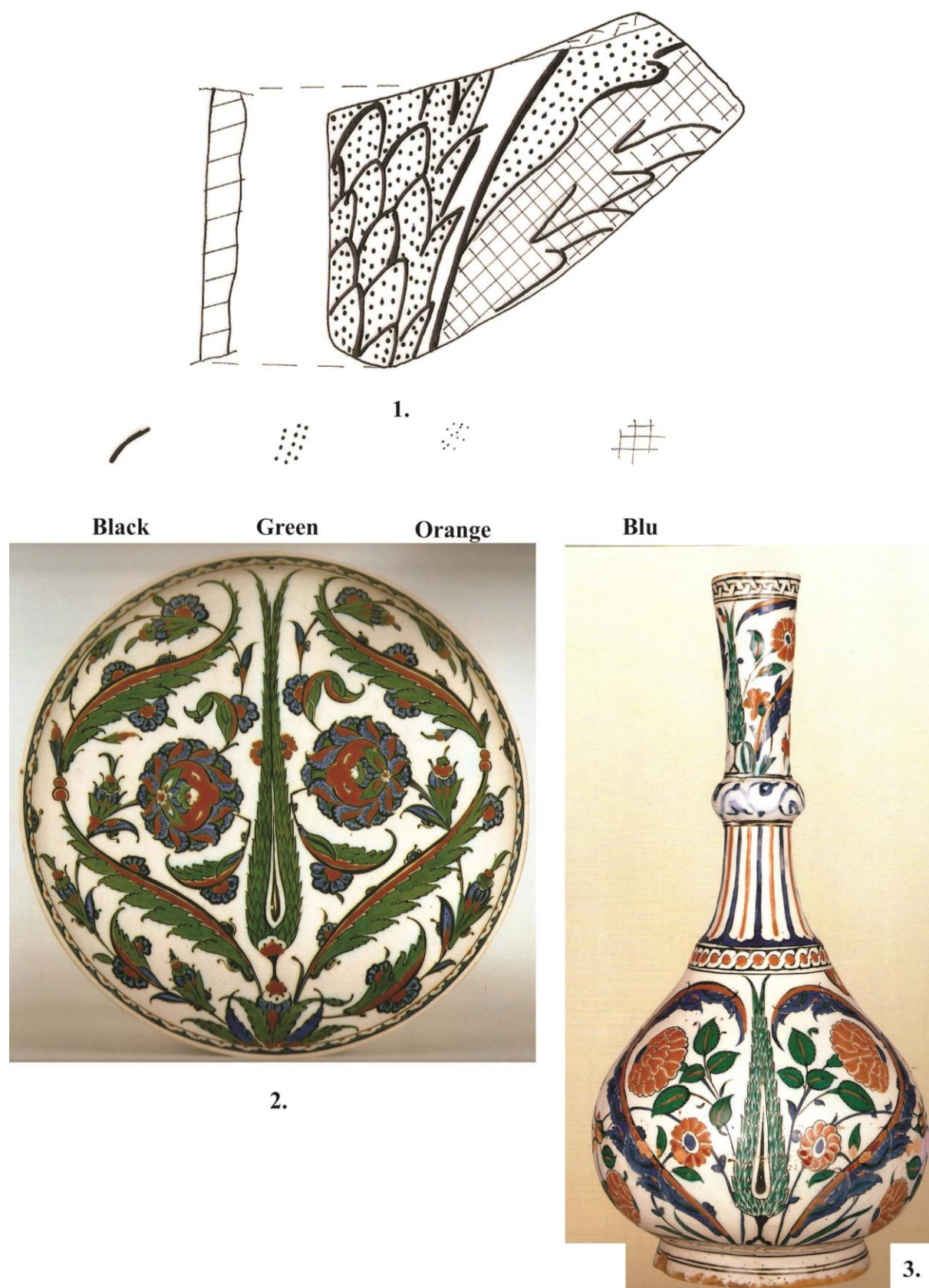
¹⁶ Unpublished.



Pl. 3. Partial plan of the medieval town.



Pl. 4. 1. Location of grave; 2. coin; 3. grave 1/1996.



Pl. 5. Iznik pottery from Piuia Petri/1996; 2. Iznik pottery (1565-1570); 3. Iznik pottery (1575-1580) (according to Atasoy, Raby 1994).



Pl. 6. 1. Iznik pottery from Piua Petri/1996; 2. Iznik pottery 1580, below (according to Atasoy, Raby 1994).

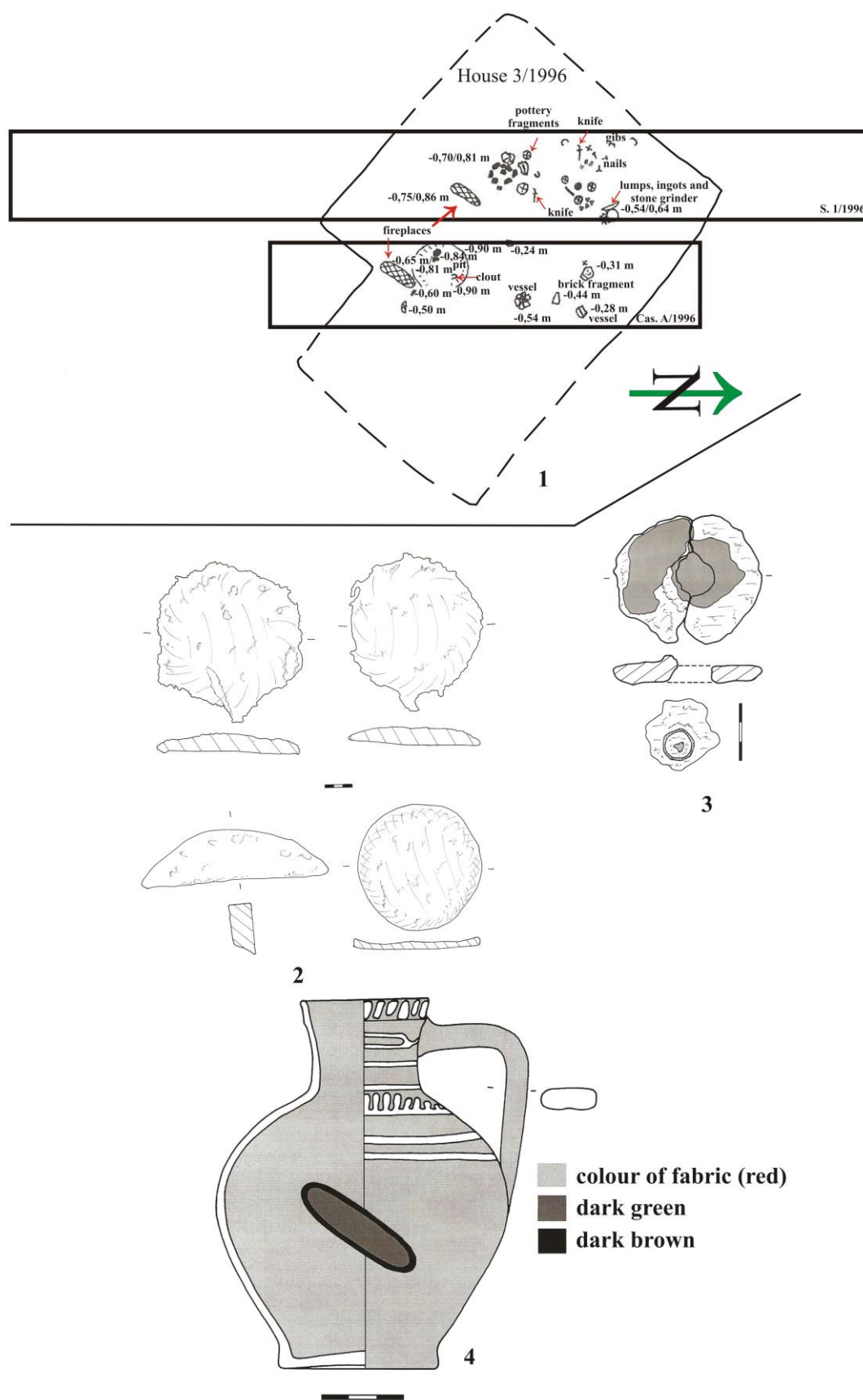
Oriental pottery of Milletus type,¹⁷ dated in the 15th century, found in the same section where the human bones were registered helped us to date the bones, too (Pl. 8). The pottery was discovered in areas with household waste above the sterile soil. Two waste pits are contemporary with the remnants of the dead body. The first one, 1.28 m deep, contained destroyed millstones, fragments of large size cauldrons, a dog skeleton, parts of clay walls, common use or enamelled pottery and animal bones. The presence in the same place of household waste and parts of a dead body suggests a violent destruction of the area, most probably in the 15th century. A possible pit for the human bones was not observed; therefore, we suppose that the parts of the dead body were not properly buried. Probably after a relatively long-time span, the area was covered and levelled with earth. Three dwellings were discovered in the same area, but their dating, considering the Iznik pottery, is a later one, in the 16th century. Pottery manufactured between 1560 and 1585 was found near one of these dwellings (Pl. 9/3).¹⁸ The pottery found inside the same dwelling was manufactured in the last decade of the 16th century (Pl. 10/3-4).¹⁹ Another dwelling was constructed after the moment when the two waste pits were filled. The third dwelling, identified immediately under the ploughed soil layer, is even later. Due to recent agricultural work, its inventory was scattered.

Several questions come into our minds. The first one is related to the status of the two deceased. Were they properly buried, meaning that we are dealing with graves outside cemeteries, or in both cases it was just an accident? If we are talking about graves, why these individuals were not buried in a cemetery?

¹⁷ Atasoy, Raby 1994, 82-83.

¹⁸ Atasoy, Raby 1994, cat. 733,743.

¹⁹ Atasoy, Raby 1994, cat. 556, 557.



Pl. 7. 1. House 3/1996; 2. lumps and ingots; 3. stone grinder; 4. jug.

The two cases discussed before differ one from another. Taking into consideration the orientation of the skeleton (west-east), the position (lying on the back) and the deposition of a coin, we believe that the first individual, found on the top of the bank ridge no. 6a, was buried, in the proper sense of the word. Even if it was found outside the consecrated land of the cemetery, the deceased was buried according to the prescriptions of the Christian Church²⁰ and the burial ritual documented in Piua Petri during the 16th century.²¹ The deposition of a coin is well attested for many other graves dated during 16th century, found both in urban (Adjud,²² Bacău,²³ Târgu Trotuș,²⁴ Suceava,²⁵ Târgoviște²⁶) or rural (Bătinești,²⁷ Fântânele,²⁸ Vadu Sorești²⁹) cemeteries. In our opinion, we are dealing with previously called 'deviant burial' or 'Sonderbestattung', more precisely a burial different (in body position or treatment, location or construction of the grave, grave-goods) from the burial norm observed in a cemetery or an area in a certain period³⁰. Recent contributions drew attention that only two categories ('normal' burials and 'deviant burials') are not enough to describe the great variety of the funerary behaviour of a certain group and imply a negative connotation.³¹ Instead of 'Sonderbestattungen' it would be better to talk about 'seltene Bestattungspraktiken'³² (rare burial practices). The grave found in Piua Petri differs from the other burials found here not in body position or treatment, but only in location, namely outside the cemetery. The absence of cemeteries is not a valid explanation, because during the 16th century at least one graveyard was identified in the southern area of the town. In the absence of historical sources, a discussion about the meaning of such a rare burial practice implies a lot of caution³³. A widespread explanation consists in the supposition that this kind of burials is the result either of an unusual life, or of an unusual death. An unusual death could be caused by accidents (including death of a woman in childbirth), suicide or murder.³⁴ The expression 'unusual life' refers either to individuals with disabilities, or to those belonging to marginal groups (for instance to another religion), but include witches or criminals, too³⁵. It is hard to know the precise cause of death of the man found in Piua

²⁰ See, for example, the discussions about cemeteries and burials in Western Europe – Ariès 1996, 60-69, 74-100, 115-126 and Bossy 1998, 43-53.

²¹ See, for instance, graves 116(31), 164(72), 170(78) – Chițescu et al. 1982, 151, 153, 154; grave 47 – Chițescu et al. 1979, 205.

²² Artimon 1976, 241.

²³ Artimon 1981, 20.

²⁴ Artimon 1982, 108; Artimon 1984, 109-110.

²⁵ Batariuc 1993, 234.

²⁶ Cantacuzino et al. 1981, 509.

²⁷ Paragină, Bobi 1993, 499, 505, 510.

²⁸ Artimon 1985, 99-100.

²⁹ Drâmbocianu 1993, 473, 477.

³⁰ Aspöck 2008, 17; Chapman 2010, 64-65; Veit 2013, 19-20.

³¹ Aspöck 2013, 26-27; Gramsch 2013, 511.

³² Gramsch 2013, 514.

³³ Weiss-Krejci 2008, 188.

³⁴ Aspöck 2013, 26; Weiss-Krejci 2008, 284.

³⁵ Aspöck 2013, 26.

Petri. The deposition of a coin and the careful interment in an area where dwellings did not exist, but only gardens, could give us a clue. In our opinion, a crime must be excluded, because the deceased was carefully buried. Two other explanations could be taken into consideration – suicide or a non-Orthodox person, but we are not sure if these suppositions are made according to our modern taste and perception of what a proper burial is supposed to be³⁶. It is important to emphasize that even a rare funerary practice must be analysed as part of the cultural practices of a society, therefore is a form of social communication which creates and changes the social structure.³⁷ Unfortunately, no available analogies of interments outside cemeteries were found, except the brief mention of the existence of some isolated graves in Bârlad.³⁸

No matter the causes of death, the grave is an important clue for the chronology of the medieval town. Traces of a fire were observed on the top of the bank ridge no. 6a, dated after the middle of the 16th century, when both the workshop for the manufacture of bronze and the dwelling where the lumps and the ingots of bronze were kept were destroyed (Pl. 7/1). The workshop and the dwelling overlapped the grave. Taking into account the coin issued in 1563 deposited in the grave and the fact that the dwelling was used for several years, the fire could be dated at the end of the 16th century. Another argument could be the Iznik pottery found nearby, whose colours and ornaments seem to indicate a production between 1575 and 1580 (Pl. 5/3).³⁹

The problem of the second skeleton is a different one. The deceased was not buried, but it was cut and left near a water course. The differences in comparison with the other burials found in Piua Petri consist both in body position and location.

It is clear that the area where the scattered bones were found was destroyed at a certain moment. The arguments are the destroyed millstones, the fragments of broken large sized cauldrons and the fragments of clay walls thrown in waste pits. The causes of the destruction of the area are difficult to be supposed, at least for now. The documents indicate the destruction of the town in 1470, during the attack of the army of Stephen the Great. A chronological relation between the fragments of the dead body and the mentioned attack is the most probable explanation, in our opinion.

Human bones found in settlements are difficult to analyse. Skeletons of two children, carelessly thrown, were discovered in a pit in the settlement from Lipnik, dated during 2nd–4th centuries AD. In the same pit were deposited later the remnants of a cremated adult. The authors suppose that the two children were sacrificed, but they cannot explain why the cremated adult was found in the same pit.⁴⁰ Men, women and children thrown into waste pits were found in several Sarmatian settlements in the Great Hungarian Plains,⁴¹ or in the recently excavated settlement in Arad–*Bariera*,⁴² but in the literature there is not a common opinion concerning the cause of the death – low

³⁶ Aspöck 2008, 23; Aspöck 2013, 26.

³⁷ Gramsch 2013, 512-513.

³⁸ Ghiurcă 2011, 101.

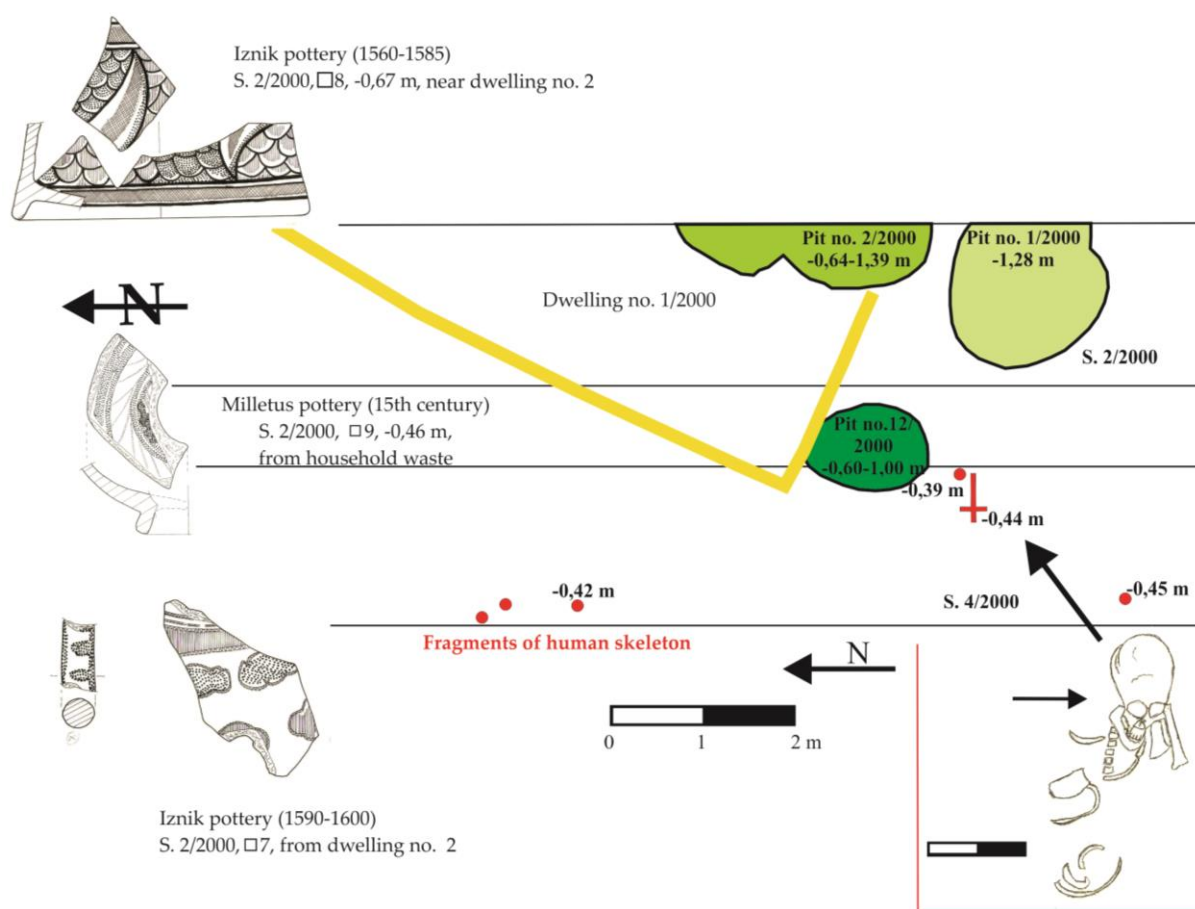
³⁹ Atasoy, Raby 1994, cat. 728.

⁴⁰ Przybyła et al. 2010, 31-35, 58.

⁴¹ Grumeza et al. 2013, 26-27; Istvánovits 1999, 176; Przybyła et al. 2010, 42; Vaday 1997, 105.

⁴² Grumeza et al. 2013, 26.

social rank (slaves), troubles caused by the Gepids, human sacrifices or just a great variety of funerary practices of the Sarmatians.⁴³ Some of the storage pits from the settlement in Zastavnoe were secondarily used as graves.⁴⁴ In a pit close to the household annexes of a *villa rustica* in Șeușa was found the skeleton of a one month old child. The pit was later filled with building materials. The authors think to a grave, whose unusual location is due to the fact that the child belonged to a lower social category.⁴⁵ Other graves were registered in the early medieval settlements in Gornea-Zomoniță and Țărmuri.⁴⁶



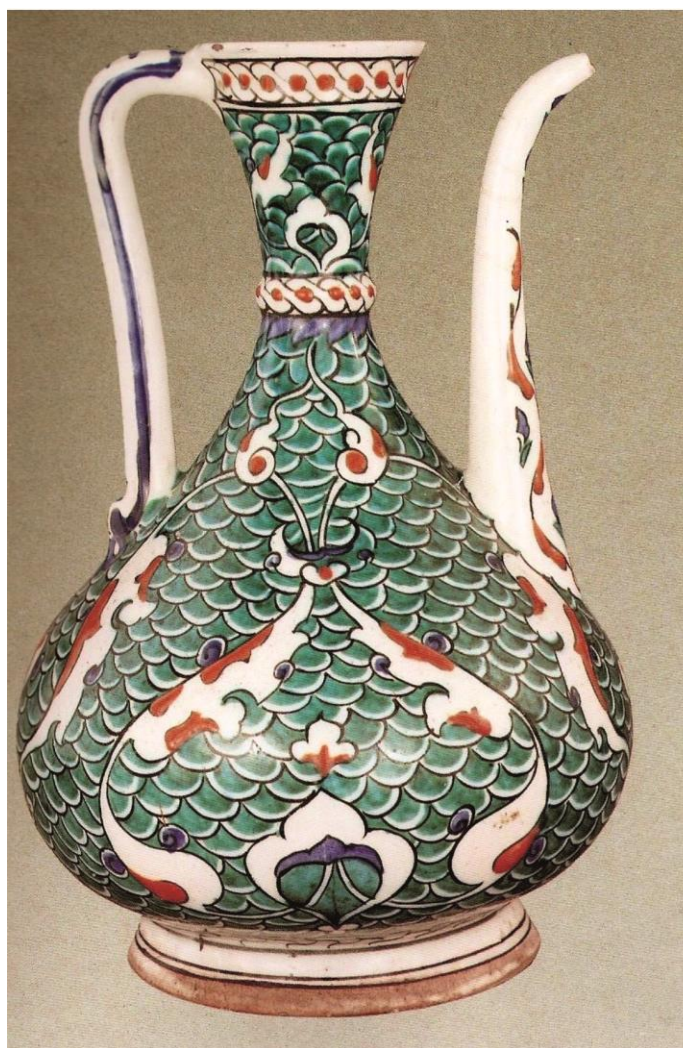
Pl. 8. Disconnected human bones discovered in 2000.

⁴³ Grumeza et al. 2013, 28; Istvánovits 1999, 176-177; Vaday 1997, 106-107.

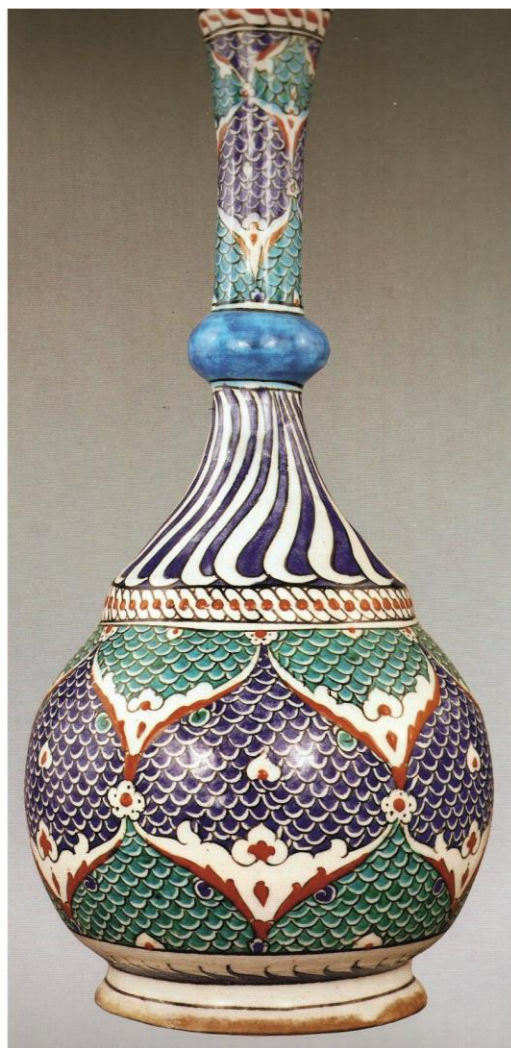
⁴⁴ Kotigoroško 1995, 116.

⁴⁵ Sonoc et al. 2005, 53-54, 57, 63.

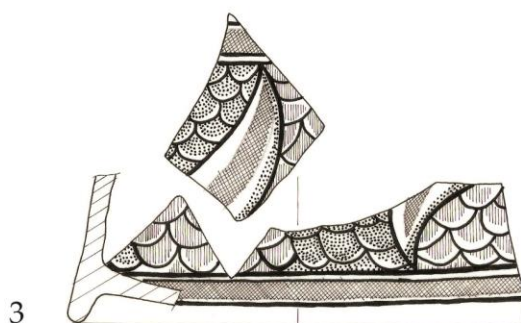
⁴⁶ OȚa 2008, 188, 249, 252 (with previous bibliography).



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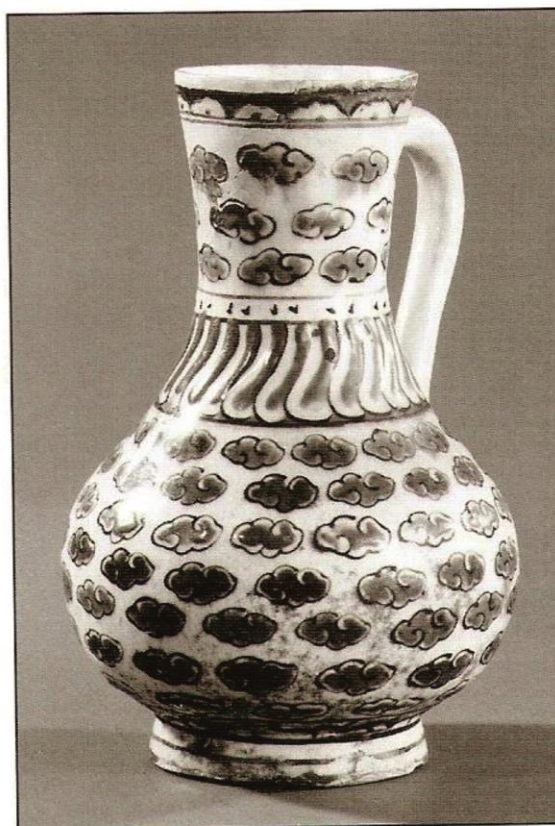


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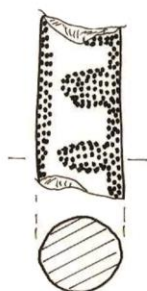
Pl. 9. Iznik pottery (1575-1580); 2. Iznik pottery (1580-1585); 3. Iznik pottery from Piuă Pietri/2000 (according to Atasoy, Raby 1994).



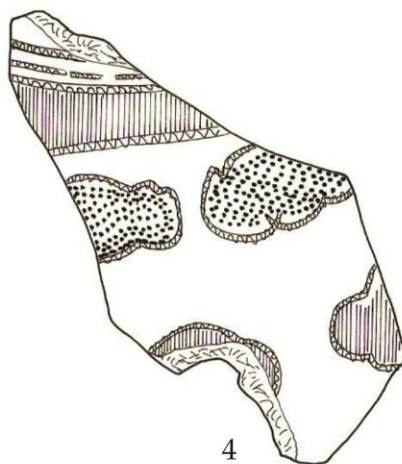
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Pl. 10. 1-2. Iznik pottery (1590-1600) (according to Atasoy, Raby 1994); 3-4. Iznik pottery from Piua Petri.

A significant difference has to be emphasized. In all the previously mentioned settlements, the human bones were found in pits, unlike the woman in Piua Petri, whose dead body seems to be left on the spot, without being properly buried. We believe that the scattered bones of the women cannot be interpreted as burial. In this case, we have to deal with a so-

called 'unburied dead'.⁴⁷ Why the woman was not buried is a question difficult to solve in the present stage of the research. According to literary sources, the attack against the region of Ialomiţa was a bloody one⁴⁸. Although the number of killed individuals is supposed to be a high one, except for the woman found on the top of the bank ridge no. 1, no mass graves or other unburied dead were found up until now in Piua Petri. Perhaps the area was hardly affected comparing to other neighbourhoods of the medieval town, devastated and remained deserted, at least for a while. Unfortunately, it is hard to know precisely why the bones were found disconnected – was the woman killed and then cut into pieces, or perhaps the corpse was disturbed and torn to pieces by animals? A similar situation was observed in Târgu Trotuş, where the skeleton of an adult woman was found on the floor of a house destroyed by a fire caused by a raid of foreign military troops in Moldavia during the 17th century.⁴⁹ Four unburied deceased were discovered in a fired house from the early medieval (10th–11th centuries) settlement in Târgşoru Vechi, probably as result of a supposed Petcheneg attack.⁵⁰

Up until now, the 'rare burial practice' and the remains of the killed woman in Piua Petri are only exceptions but their significance for the topography and chronology of the town cannot be denied.

One last observation regards the funerary habits attested in the 15th and 16th centuries in urban or rural cemeteries from Wallachia and Moldavia. Graves with unusual orientation (east-west) or body position were observed in Târgu Trotuş, too.⁵¹ In other two graves in Piua Petri, the deceased were found lying on abdomen.⁵² Four crouched skeletons were registered in the cemetery from Brăneşti–Vadu Anei.⁵³ Despite their low number, these exceptions draw attention on an unexpected variety of funerary practices at a time when the Orthodox Church was supposed to control and standardize all the funerals.

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⁴⁷ Weiss-Krejci 2013, 281.

⁴⁸ Costăchescu 1935, 9.

⁴⁹ Artimon 1989, 228-229.

⁵⁰ Păunescu 1975, 231-232, 233.

⁵¹ Artimon 1999, 113.

⁵² Coman et al. 2003, 50.

⁵³ Păunescu, Teodor 2006, 297, 301, 302, 304 (graves 91, 236, 272 and 336).

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